

FULFILLING THE INTERNATIONAL MISSION OF THE US NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Stephen Morris and Jonathan Putnam, guest editors

The Importance of International Involvement of the National Park Service

Jonathan B. Jarvis

IN SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR, I TRAVELED TO TAYRONA NATIONAL PARK in Colombia, South America, to meet with about 15 park directors from around the world, places like Kenya, New Zealand, Mexico, and South Korea. For a few days we informally discussed issues of climate change, relevancy (South Africa's National Park Director David Mabunda lamented that the black residents of Johannesburg are not coming to Kruger National Park!), economics and park funding, wildlife encounters, and the politics of conservation. We meet to assert that parks and protected areas are essential antidotes to the challenges facing the world. It is not easy to understand the place the United States holds in the minds of the national park systems around the world until you hear it directly from peers.



The US is respected worldwide for our economy, our military, our democratic principles, our human rights, our justice system, and the opportunity

Director Jarvis signing a sister park agreement in Cambodia.

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for every citizen to achieve his or her full potential; we are also a respected leader for our conservation of the environment and our preservation of our history. Our presence on the international stage brings legitimacy and weight to the efforts of the protected area community at a time when threats to our institutions come from all corners. Plus, we have as much to learn as we have to give, as we certainly do not have all the ideas: Mexico has created private wilderness areas, Colombia works with indigenous land owners to conserve the environment and their culture, Australia is way ahead on the health aspects of the outdoors, and South Africa is pioneering techniques to stop the trade of animal parts.

As we look to the World Parks Congress in 2014, NPS will be there and helping to elevate the importance of special places that need public support and long-term preservation.

Jon Jarvis is director of the National Park Service.